

Rules of the Game

All About Psionics (Part Two)

By Skip Williams



We covered a few psionic basics last week. This week, we'll consider a few ways that psionics resembles magic (because magic and the rules that govern it provide a familiar point of reference) and a few ways that psionics aren't like magic at all. All the material in this section assumes that the psionics-magic transparency rules from page 55 in the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* are in play. Things will be different if you don't use psionics-magic transparency; see pages 65-66 in the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* for details.

In the core **D&D** game, psionic powers are a kind of **spell-like ability** (see pages 297-298 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). Even in a psionic campaign, it's helpful to think of psionic powers as something that works much like a spell-like ability. The following material is largely derived from Rules of the Game's earlier series on [spell-like abilities](#).

Similarities Between Spells and Psionic Abilities

A psionic power is like a **spell** in the following ways:



- Using a psionic power is a **standard action** that provokes an **attack of opportunity**.

Sometimes using a psionic power can be a **swift** or **immediate action**, a **full-round action**, or have an even longer manifestation time. The exact manifestation time is given in the power's description.

A creature using a psionic power can use all the tricks that a spellcaster can use to avoid provoking attacks of opportunity from foes that threaten it. The creature can take a **5-foot step** before using the power (to get out of a threatened area). The creature also can make a Concentration **check** to use the ability defensively. The **DC** for the check is 15 plus the power's level.

- A psionic power can be disrupted.

Anything that could disrupt a spellcaster's concentration and ruin a spell can do the same thing to a psionic power. A psionicist subjected to a potential disruption can make a Concentration check to stay focused and finish manifesting the power. Pages 37-38 and 54 in the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* contain rules for handling the Concentration check.

- A psionic power is subject to the effects of **antimagic**.

An *antimagic field* or a beholder's antimagic ray suppresses a psionic power so that it has no effect. This suppression does not dispel the power's effects, however, so if the power's duration outlasts the antimagic effect, the power's effects resume functioning when the antimagic effect goes away. Time spent inside the antimagic effect still counts against the power's duration, however.

- A psionic power can be **dispelled**.

All the usual limitations of dispel effects apply to dispels used against psionic powers. For example, a psionic power with an instantaneous duration cannot be dispelled, and the dispel user must make a successful **caster level check** to dispel any psionic power with a longer duration.

Some psionic powers aren't subject to dispelling; if so, the power's description will say so.

- A psionic power is subject to **spell resistance**.

The creature using the psionic power must make a manifester level check to overcome the subject's spell resistance. A psionic power also is subject to power resistance, which is the psionic equivalent of spell resistance.

Some psionic powers are not subject to power resistance, and this is noted in the power's description. A power that is not subject to power resistance also is not subject to spell resistance.

- A **save** DC for a psionic power is calculated in basically the same way a save DC for a spell is calculated.

The save DC for a psionic power is 10 + the power's level + the manifester's relevant **ability modifier**. The power's description gives the power's level. The manifester's class description gives the manifester's relevant ability.

- Psionic powers are renewed on a daily basis.

To recharge herself mentally, a psionicist must have 8 hours of sleep. The psionicist need not slumber every moment of that time, but she must refrain from doing anything mentally or physically strenuous. See page 55 in the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* for a list of activities that disrupt a psionicist's rest.

A disruption in a psionicist's rest is inconvenient, but it's not a disaster. A disruption extends the total rest the psionicist needs to recharge by 1 hour. For example, Altanna's party camps for the night, and Altanna goes to sleep as soon as she can. Six hours later, a horde of undead nearly overruns the camp and Altanna must help with the defense. When the dust settles, Altanna still needs 2 hours of rest to recharge her psychic energy (because she has slept only 6 hours), plus an additional hour to make up for the disruption.

In addition to the total rest requirement, a psionicist must have a minimum of 1 hour of uninterrupted rest immediately before regaining her daily power points. Upon completing the required rest period, the psionicist

must concentrate for 1 full round to gain her new allotment of power points. Any power points the psionicist expended during the 8 hours prior to concentrating count against the new day's allotment of power (see page 64 in the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*).

Differences Between Spells and Psionic Powers

A psionic power is not a spell, even though it works much like a spell. Important differences between powers and spells include the following:

- A psionic power has no verbal, somatic, material, or focus components.

Using a psionic power is a purely mental action, albeit one that requires enough concentration to provoke attacks of opportunity.

A number of powers require the psionicist to expend some experience in addition to psionic power points. If so, this is noted in the power's description. You expend any required **XP** when you manifest the power. If the manifestation fails for any reason, the XP (and the psionic power points) you spent on the power are still lost.

- A psionic power cannot be used as a counterspell, nor is it subject to counterspells.

A counterspell involves recognizing a spell as it is being cast, then quickly altering that same spell so as to create an opposite effect that cancels out the original spell. A psionic power taps the manifester's mental energy in a process unlike any spell. (Many powers have results similar to certain spells, but they achieve those results through different means.)

As noted earlier, most psionic powers are subject to dispelling (unless their descriptions say they are not). When a psionic power can be dispelled (as most of them are), one *can* effectively counter them with a *dispel magic* spell (or the *dispel psionics* power). While psionic powers are not normally subject to counterspells, *dispel magic* is not really a counterspell. When you use *dispel magic* as a counterspell, what you're really doing is quickly casting a targeted dispel effect at the correct moment to negate the enemy spell and not creating an opposite magical effect that cancels your enemy's spell.

What's Next?

We're out of time once again. Next week we'll conclude our look at psionics by considering a few miscellaneous points relevant to psionics and psionicists.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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